



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For additional information:
Please contact the Joint Information Center at 970-812-3351

August 14, 2015
5:00 p.m.

Update on Local Response to Gold King Mine and Animas River Impacts in La Plata County

Durango, CO – La Plata County, San Juan Basin Health Department, Southern Ute Indian Tribe, City of Durango, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Southwest Incident Management Team, Colorado Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Colorado Mounted Rangers and Mountain Studies Institute are all working together on our La Plata County community response to the impacts from the Gold King Mine.

City of Durango's priority is to ensure the safety of the municipal drinking water and has developed a plan to resume pumping water from the Animas River. Decisions to resume pumping will be made on the basis of the City's independent water quality testing results, which are expected today. The City plans to utilize a phased approach that allows the use of City water for irrigation over a period of several days and includes elevated water quality sampling protocols. More information about the decision to open the intake and resume pumping is expected. The results of the water quality analysis will be posted on the City's website at www.durangogov.org. In the meantime, residents and businesses are encouraged to continue voluntary water conservation measures.

Testing residential water wells in the area continues. Those wells most at risk are shallow and directly adjacent to the Animas River. Results for the wells tested on Saturday, August 8 and Sunday, August 9 are expected to be given to residents on Friday, August 14 and Saturday, August 15. Preliminary data from the first 16 wells sampled show that no well tested above regulatory drinking water levels. After reviewing groundwater data, state health department toxicologists have confirmed that it is safe to shower in well water even if testing has not come back on your particular well.

However, the state health department has the following recommendations for well owners who have results from testing their wells:

- Do not use well water to make infant formula at this time if your water has been tested and shows manganese levels above 430 ug/L. Use bottled water. Certain baby formulas contain manganese, and if those formulas are prepared with water that also contains manganese, the infant may get a higher dose than the rest of the family. In addition, young children appear to absorb more manganese than

- older age groups but excrete less. This adds up to a greater potential for exposure in the very young.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women should avoid drinking well water with manganese levels above 500 ug/L.
- High manganese levels may have existed before the mine accident, so private well owners who have high levels should compare current results with any past test results. Visual signs of high manganese levels include black colored water.

Private water well owners with questions can call Andrew Ross at 303-692-3395 or visit the San Juan Basin Health Department website for more information.

Concerns have been expressed by the community concerning air quality. In general, metals become part of the atmosphere chemically, but do bind to organic materials (such as soil) making them heavier and less likely to become airborne.

To monitor the effects of the spill, Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) placed fingerling rainbow trout in cages in the Animas River in Durango. Fingerling trout – one to two inches long – were used because they are most sensitive to environmental toxins. A total of 108 fish were placed in cages in three locations in the river a few hours before the plume reached Durango on August 6. All but one of the fish survived and they were removed from the river on August 11. The fish were robust, active and showed no signs of stress. The fish were frozen and sent to the state health department in Denver for testing. Scientists will be looking for metals accumulation in tissue and organs. Results of those tests won't be available for at least two weeks; therefore consumption of fish from the Animas River is not advised at this time.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife has not seen or heard of any adverse impacts to terrestrial wildlife. Citizens can report fish kills and other spill effects on wildlife by calling Colorado Parks and Wildlife at 970-247-0855.

Incident information is posted to the La Plata County website at <http://www.co.laplata.co.us/emergency>, San Juan Basin Health Department's Website at www.sjbhd.org, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/LaPlataCounty, and <http://www.facebook.com/sanjuanbasinhealth>. Data is posted to Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment website at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/animas-river-spill>, at EPA's website at <http://www2.epa.gov/goldkingmine>. La Plata County has set up a call center for questions from citizens at 970-385-8700, open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Southern Ute Tribal members may call the Tribal Hotline at 970-563-5025.

###